

City of Reading
City Council
Work Session
Monday, May 19, 2008

Council Members Present

Vaughn Spencer, President
Stephen Fuhs, District 1
Marcia Goodman-Hinnershitz, District 2
Dennis Sterner, District 3
Stratton Marmarou, District 4
Maria Baez, District 5
Jeff Waltman, District 6

Others Present

R. Hottenstein
L. Kelleher
C. Younger
F. Kasprowicz, Reading Public Library
P. Hoh, Library Board
J. Scott, BEP

Call to Order

President of Council Vaughn Spencer called the work session to order at 7:12 pm.

Managing Director's Report

Mr. Hottenstein highlighted the report distributed to Council distributed to Council at the Work Session covering the following:

- Information concerning parking, trash, and recycling collection in areas on the Commerce Bike race course.
- Berks County Conservancy nature walk on Thursday, June 12th through the Earl Sanctuary on Antietam Road in Alsace Township
- Availability of Reading Fire Fighting Books for \$20
- The new year codes program on BCTV MAC Channel showing commercial projects taking place in Reading

Mr. Fuhs inquired why the Conservancy is charging a fee for the Conservancy Tour. He also inquired if this property was transferred to the Conservancy from the Earl Trust.

Mr. Hottenstein said he would research and respond.

Reading Public Library

Frank Kasprowicz, Executive Director of the Reading Public Library and Paul Hoh, member of the Reading Library Board gave a state of the library report. Mr. Kasprowicz stated that the library recently received an award from the Pennsylvania Library Association for best practices. They also reported on the receipt of many grants used to upgrade computers, upgrade furniture, provide community outreach, and develop the collection. He stated in 2006 the Reading Public Library received the Albright College Presidents award for leadership in Learning for a Lifetime.

Mr. Kasprowicz stated that to date the library has circulated four hundred thousand materials, has served 293,000 people, and has served 78,000 internet visitors.

Mr. Kasprowicz noted the resurrection of the Library Newsletter and the creation of a new brochure. He stated that the Summer Reading Program has doubled in student participation. Mr. Hoh noted the need for a new book mobile, which serves the elderly high rise properties. Mr. Hottenstein said that this expense could be covered with unused CDBG funds.

Mr. Kasprowicz noted the many successes and challenges the Library faces. He stated that Library has never recovered from Governor Rendell's severe reduction that occurred between 2003 and 2005. He noted that staff has been reduced by half and the library facility is in need of physical maintenance.

Mr. Kasprowicz distributed an achievement sheet covering 2002 through 2007 and pamphlets on senior, youth, and reference services.

He noted that the Library also serves as a repository for government records.

Mr. Marmarou noted the great work and great programs offered by the Reading Public Library. He inquired which branch libraries are most popular.

Mr. Kasprovicz replied that Northeast and Southeast Branch Libraries are very popular. He noted that the space limitations hinder the popularity of the Northwest Branch. He expressed the belief that a new facility that would provide more room and would be of better support that quadrant.

Mr. Marmarou inquired if the library will provide Council with a list of the maintenance requests submitted to the Public Works Department. Mr. Hoh and Mr. Kasprovicz will provide a copy of the list to City Council.

Mr. Hoh noted that the library was turned over to the City over 100 years ago. The City is responsible for the maintenance of the buildings although sometimes other projects cause delays in accomplishing requested repairs.

Mr. Sterner questioned Governor Rendell's rationale when reducing library funding as Governor Rendell claims to support literacy and education.

Mr. Sterner inquired if there has been any increase in the County's contribution to library services. Mr. Hoh announced that the amount is unchanged; however the County has passed through a small amount of additional funding to all County library organizations.

Mr. Hoh noted the long standing support of the State, County, and City for library operations. He noted that historically the library has not conducted capital campaigns to support its facilities or programs. However, some of the libraries programs have been underwritten by area businesses.

Mr. Kasprovicz stated that for every tax dollar invested in a community's library, we invest five dollars and fifty cents is nvested in the community.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the vibrancy of the Southeast Branch. She noted that the comfort of the facility and welcoming attitude of the staff serves the southeast community well. She also suggested reopening a discussion with the County Commissioners on increasing their annual contribution.

Mr. Hoh stated that libraries promote economic development in cities. He asked Council to consider a CD budget amendment to purchase a second book mobile or to provide some funding to replace the Northwest Branch Library.

Mr. Waltman thanked Mr. Kasprovicz and the Library Board for their hard work to provide programs that encourage education and literacy.

BEP Update

John Scott, Executive Director of BEP (Berks Economic Partnership) distributed a packet of information about BEP's activities. He described BEP's mission to grow, strengthen, and attract economic development. He described BEP's marketing initiatives, both in print and electronic media, to seek out developers. He described BEP's outreach through attending trade shows and offering forums to get the attention of the right developers.

Mr. Scott stated the BEP received six hundred inquiries in 2007 and reviewed nearly 260 prospects. He stated that BEP has completed twenty four projects and creating 1400 jobs. He stated that BEP has worked with a Chamber Marketing Team and other partners to create a strategic plan. To date BEP has created five thousand jobs in the Greater Reading Area. He noted the states financial assistance with economic development projects.

Mr. Scott noted the importance of the four cluster areas identified along the Penn Corridor. Currently BEP is taking the project to the next level. He described BEP's efforts to attract people to the Penn Corridor. He stated that the City's contribution of \$30,000 has provided a lobby group in Harrisburg and D.C. area. These lobbyist work to obtain financial support for the city projects. The lobby effort secured 1.9 million dollars for 2007 for projects such as the surveillance cameras, street lighting, and public safety initiatives. The lobbyists are currently seeking funding to assist with the Waste Water Treatment Plant project. They are currently working to obtain 2.5 million dollars to assist with the design and engineering phases of the project. He stated that BEP is also working on a main street application for the City.

Mr. Marmarou thanked BEP for their report and inquired how soon the City will be receiving the funding for the surveillance cameras. Mr. Scott stated that funding should be in hand in two to three weeks. He stated that this is a reimbursement type grant.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz asked Mr. Scott to submit information on economic development activities here, compared to Lancaster and Allentown.

Ms. Kelleher asked Mr. Scott when BEP would be focusing their attention on economic development for the 5th & Penn area. Mr. Scott stated that the economic development of the 5th & Penn area is not something BEP

can undertake alone. He noted the need for a partnership with several organizations to assist in this effort.

Ms. Kelleher stated that it is quite distressing to see the 5th & Penn area ignored, in comparison to the effort and funding used to create retail shopping in West Reading and Wyomissing. She inquired if Reading would become the parking lot to West Reading and Wyomissing.

Mr. Sterner thanked Mr. Scott for his report for his enthusiasm. He expressed the belief that if the public overcomes its perception of crime in Reading, the City will see a larger turn around. He suggested that BEP assist in working to change the perception of the City.

Mr. Scott agreed that the City is plagued by misperception. He stated that these perceptions can be corrected through the camera project and the reimplementation of Canine Unit in the Police Department.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz expressed the belief that the opening of the Archive store is the start to a much needed change.

Mr. Scott agreed and noted the upscale merchandise offered by Archive.

Mr. Spencer stated that several economic development agencies claim success initiated by Albert Boscov. He noted the failure of Greater Berks to maintain and redevelop Whitener's, Farr's, Waco, Mumma, and Trexler Mansion buildings. He noted that Greater Berks let these buildings deteriorate to the point where some needed to be demolished. He also noticed the City's frustration with the manner in which Greater Berks undercut the City's ability to purchase the Dana store yard. He described the public safety concerns generated through the increase of truck traffic at Berkshire Bottling and Corstacks. He stated that Greater Berks seems to hinder rather than help economic development that would benefit the City.

Mr. Spencer expressed the belief in the need for BEP to act as an economic development umbrella to coordinate those efforts. However, he expressed the belief that Greater Berks is not a friend to the City or to economic development.

Mr. Scott noted discussion with the DCED pertaining to the uncooperative attitude of Greater Berks. However, he added that Greater Berks is well versed in issues such as leveraging PIDA (Pennsylvania Industrial Development Authority.) Mr. Scott noted BEP's ability to forward clients to the proper resources such as Greater Berks and other agencies with a

positive end result in mind.

Vehicle Use Policy

Mr. Hottenstein distributed a vehicle use policy created by the Administration. He suggested that the Public Works Committee review and discuss the policy at their June meeting.

Mr. Marmarou asked Mr. Hottenstein to redraft the document showing the changes made to the original policies, and those taken from the ordinance proposed by City Council. – R. Hottenstein

Mr. Fuhs noted the need for policy to include a vehicle maintenance component to be managed by the City garage. – R. Hottenstein

As no further business was brought forward the Work Session was adjourned at approximately 9:20 pm.

Respectfully submitted by,

Linda A. Kelleher, City Clerk

Follow up Issues

- Earl Poole Sanctuary on Antietam Road transferred to the Conservancy from Earl Trust- R. Hottenstein
- Is the Conservancy Charging a fee for the nature walk or requesting a donation? – R. Hottenstein

- Amendment to CDBG Budget for \$125,000 for a library book mobile – R. Hottenstein
- List of repairs submitted by library – L. Kelleher
- List of economic development activities in Reading, Lancaster, and Allentown, including the state and federal financing provided – R. Hottenstein
- Redraft of vehicle use policy for the Public Works Committee in June showing the differences from the original administrative policy and showing language from taken from the ordinance prepared by Council
- Amendment of the vehicle use policy to include vehicle maintenance as prescribed by the City garage